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 TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1265  
 INFO RUEHLL/CONTADORA COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
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EXDIS

EXDIS/CONTRA, FOR EXDIS/CONTRA DISTRIBUTION

FROM AMBASSADOR HABIB

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
 TAGS: PREL, XK, NU  
 SUBJECT: SUMMARY OF HABIB VISIT TO CENTRAL AMERICA

1. SECRET - ENTIRE TEXT.

SUMMARY

2. MY VISIT TO CENTRAL AMERICA REASSURED ME THAT CEREZO, DUARTE AND AZCONA ARE APPROACHING THE PERIOD AHEAD WITH THEIR EYES OPEN. (MONGE IS SOLID BUT IS LEAVING OFFICE MAY 8 AND I HAVE NOT SEEN ARIAS YET.) THE SELF-CONFIDENCE AND CLOSE COMMUNICATION AMONG THE CENTRAL AMERICAN DEMOCRACIES THAT I OBSERVED ON MY LAST TRIP ARE STILL EVIDENT. NONE OF THE FOUR PRESIDENTS BELIEVES THE SANDINISTAS WANT A CONTADORA AGREEMENT, WHICH IS PROMPTING CONSIDERATION OF SIGNING AN AGREEMENT JUNE 6 TO EXPOSE SANDINISTA OBSTACLES ONCE AND FOR ALL. I CAUTIONED THAT COMMUNISTS EXPLOIT INTRANSIGENCE TO EXTRACT CONCESSIONS AND WARNED AGAINST GIVING AWAY SUBSTANCE ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT NICARAGUA WOULD NEVER SIGN. ALL SAID THAT MY LETTER TO THE DEMOCRATIC CONGRESSMEN HELPED TO PUT NICARAGUA ON THE DEFENSIVE AND URGED US TO CONTINUE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR CONTADORA.

PLANNING FOR THE PARLIAMENT AND ESQUIPULAS SUMMIT APPEARS TO HAVE TAKEN A TURN FOR THE BETTER, AS THE OTHER DEMOCRACIES HAVE PUT THE GUATEMALANS ON NOTICE THAT THEY WILL NOT BE STEAMROLLED. AZCONA BELIEVES THAT ARIAS IS SLOWLY COMING AROUND ON THE NEED TO PRESSURE THE SANDINISTAS AND I THINK ARIAS' VICE PRESIDENT (WITH WHOM I MET) WILL BE A HELPFUL INFLUENCE. BUT THERE IS NERVOUSNESS IN SAN JOSE AS MONGE PREPARES TO LEAVE OFFICE. END SUMMARY.

3. HAVING COMPLETED MY VISIT TO CENTRAL AMERICA,

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I THOUGHT A SUMMAR OF WHAT WE LEARNED DURING THE FIRST FOUR STOPS MIGHT BE USEFUL. I WILL NOT SEE COSTA RICAN PRESIDENT-ELECT ARIAS UNTIL APRIL 26, BUT I HAD A GOOD TALK WITH HIS VICE PRESIDENT (DENGO) IN SAN JOSE. AT ALL STOPS I ASKED THE PRESIDENT TO GIVE ME HIS VIEWS ON WHERE THINGS STAND AND MADE OUR POINTS IN RESPONSE.

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CONTADORA  
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4. THE CENTRAL AMERICANS BELIEVE THAT THE PANAMA MEETING SUCCEEDED IN GETTING CONTADORA BACK ON THE TRACK OF A COMPREHENSIVE AGREEMENT, A PROBLEM SINCE CARABALLEDA. DUARTE FAULTS THE SUPPORT GROUP FOR CARABALLEDA AND CREDITS THE CONTADORA GROUP (EXCEPT MEXICO) FOR THE CORRECTION. BUT IT APPEARS THAT IT WAS THE CENTRAL AMERICANS THEMSELVES WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CARABALLEDA VIRTUALLY DROPPING OUT OF THE PICTURE.

5. NONE OF THE FOUR PRESIDENTS BELIEVE NICARAGUA WILL SIGN A CONTADORA AGREEMENT (ALTHOUGH MONGE SAID BETANCUR SAYS OTHERWISE, A POSSIBILITY HE FINDS DISTURBING). THIS BELIEF IS ENCOURAGING A TENDENCY (E.G., WITH DUARTE) TO SEIZE AND PRESS THE PUBLIC RELATIONS AND DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE. I APPLAUDED THEIR ACTIVISM, BUT CAUTIONED THAT IT IS AN OLD COMMUNIST TRICK TO EXTRACT CONCESSIONS THROUGH INTRANSIGENCE. I URGED THE CENTRAL AMERICAN LEADERS TO PRESS FOR THE SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES NEEDED TO MAKE AN AGREEMENT COMPREHENSIVE, VERIFIABLE AND SIMULTANEOUS IN IMPLEMENTATION, PARTICULARLY THE NEED FOR A TIMETABLE FOR POLITICAL COMMITMENTS. AZCONA AND DUARTE IN PARTICULAR ARE SOLID ON THE SUBSTANCE OF WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO GET A GOOD AGREEMENT AND WILL NOT BE RECKLESS. CEREZO AND QUINONES ARE STILL NEW TO THE ISSUE, BUT ARE AWARE OF THE PITFALLS OF A BAD AGREEMENT. ALL WERE RECEPTIVE TO AN INCONSPICUOUS VISIT BY ONE OR TWO STAFF-LEVEL PEOPLE TO COMPARE NOTES ON TECHNICAL DETAILS.

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SUBJECT: SUMMARY OF HABIB VISIT TO CENTRAL AMERICA

6. NONE OF THE FOUR HAD BEEN CONTACTED AT THE TIME OF MY VISIT BY THE CONTADORA GROUP ABOUT RESUMED NEGOTIATIONS. (THE COLOMBIANS TOLD ME THEY WILL BEGIN THIS WEEK OR THE NEXT.) SEVERAL ANTICIPATE SOME SLIPPAGE IN THE JUNE 6 DATE FOR A PUTATIVE SIGNING. A SINGLE TEXT OF WHATEVER HAS BEEN AGREED TO IN PRINCIPLE DOES NOT YET EXIST (EMBASSY SAN JOSE PREVIOUSLY PROVIDED TEXTS OF VERIFICATION SECTIONS AND CONTADORA GROUP PROPOSALS ON ARMS AND MANEUVERS).

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SUMMIT AND PARLIAMENT  
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7. THE GUATEMALANS ENCOUNTERED STRONG OPPOSITION FROM THE OTHER DEMOCRACIES TO CEREZO'S IDEA OF FORMING A CENTRAL AMERICAN PARLIAMENT BY APPOINTING (INSTEAD OF ELECTING DIRECTLY) ITS MEMBERS. CEREZO NOW SAYS THE FOUR WILL PUSH FOR DIRECT ELECTIONS. THE OTHER THREE WERE UNAWARE, HOWEVER, THAT THE GUATEMALANS HAVE BACKED OFF AND THIS ISSUE MAY NOT BE RESOLVED YET. DUARTE IS MINDFUL OF KEEPING THE SUMMIT AWAY FROM THE CONTRA ISSUE AND HAS WORKED OUT A LINE OF DEFENSE ("FOREIGN INTERFERENCE ISSUE WILL GO AWAY IF CENTRAL AMERICANS SOLVE THEIR INTERNAL POLITICAL CRISES") THAT APPEALS TO CEREZO. AZCONA (WHO CONSIDERS CEREZO "IDEALISTIC") AND DUARTE EXPECT NOTHING OF SUBSTANCE TO COME OF THE SUMMIT. BUT DUARTE CONTINUES TO SEE AN ALL-CENTRAL AMERICAN FORUM AS A WAY FOR THE CENTRAL AMERICANS TO TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR OWN AFFAIRS.

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 ARIAS INAUGURATION AND INITIATIVE  
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8. THE COSTA RICANS ARE NOW SPEAKING OF A SUMMIT MEETING OF CHIEFS OF STATE ATTENDING THE ARIAS INAUGURATION. THEY HOPE TO GET AGREEMENT ON A DECLARATION THAT WILL PRESSURE THE SANDINISTAS ON DEMOCRATIZATION. MONGE AND GUTIERREZ BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE SUCCESSFULLY DISCOURAGED ORTEGA FROM ATTENDING. WHETHER ARIAS CAN ACHIEVE A DECLARATION OF THIS SORT REMAINS TO BE SEEN. WE MAY HEAR ABOUT THIS FROM THE SOUTH AMERICANS, OR MAY HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL I SEE ARIAS APRIL 26. VICE PRESIDENT DENGU STRIKES ME AS A MATURE PERSON WITH A GOOD ATTITUDE WHO WILL BE A GOOD INFLUENCE ON ARIAS, WHOM HE HAS KNOWN SINCE ARIAS WAS A CHILD.

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 COMMENT  
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9. THE POSITIONS TAKEN BY THE CENTRAL AMERICAN DEMOCRACIES PROVIDE A GOOD BASIS FOR PRACTICAL DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CONTADORA AND SUPPORT GROUP COUNTRIES. THE APPARENT FIRMNESS OF THE CENTRAL AMERICAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE AND IMPLEMENTABLE AGREEMENT, AND THEIR BETTER COMMON UNDERSTANDING, WILL HELP TO AVOID AN AGREEMENT THAT IS INCOMPLETE, NOT SUBJECT TO ADEQUATE VERIFICATION AND INCONSISTENT WITH OUR OBJECTIVES. DUARTE AND AZCONA, IN PARTICULAR, MADE IT CLEAR THEY WOULD NOT ACCEPT AN UNSATISFACTORY AGREEMENT UNDER CONTADORA PRESSURE. WE CAN ALSO EXPECT THAT THE FIRMNESS OF THEIR POSITION WILL INFLUENCE CEREZO AND ARIAS SIMILARLY. FLOWER

END OF MESSAGE

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